



Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference

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Alaska Peninsula
Aleutian Chain
Bristol Bay
Kodiak Island
Pribilof Islands

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July 30, 2004

Commissioner Mike Barton
Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
3132 Channel Dr.
Juneau, AK 99801-7898

Dear Commissioner Barton:

We are writing this letter in support of the Iliamna-Nondaton Road/Bridge Project and the Aleknagik/Wood River Bridge Project. We understand that, under court order, the Department of Transportation has extracted these two projects and has subjected them to a cost-benefit analysis, resulting in the Technical Memorandum and Revised Southwest Transportation Plan (SWTP). We would like to submit the following comments on these two documents into the public record.

Both projects, the Iliamna-Nondaton Road/Bridge Project and the Aleknagik/Wood River Bridge Project, may be characterized as longstanding identified needs for the communities in the Southwest Region. They are critical to local communities and to the larger transportation picture for the region. As described in the SWTP, both projects will contribute to the creation of larger transportation corridors in Southwest Alaska, thereby creating a sustainable infrastructure that will accommodate economic development and provide for an enhanced quality of life for Southwest communities.

With regards to the Technical Memorandum, the narrative briefly touches on the benefits of these projects, and future corridors, to the communities involved. However, the Technical Memorandum fails to recognize how these two transportation projects will provide communities in the region with an overall increased public service capacity. For example, the Nulavna Consortium of Alaska Native villages, in the Lake Iliamna/Clark Lake region, have started to develop community facilities that have the ability to service multiple villages, like the Sub-Regional Health Clinic that already exists in Iliamna. There are also plans to locate one landfill/incinerator in Nondalton, as well as a Nulavna Cultural Center in Iliamna. Completion of the Iliamna-Nondalton Road/Bridge Project will increase accessibility to these state of the art community facilities and resources. In Aleknagik, the Woodriver Bridge would not only increase the health and safety of community members, but would enhance the potential for tourism and other types of economic development activities in the area.

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In terms of the more technical components of the memorandum, the tables and document figures were researched during the early stages of the development of the SWTP and are now dated. For example, fuel costs have changed dramatically since the original research for the SWTP was conducted. Therefore, figures listed in Table 5, "Estimated Petroleum Cost Savings", should be normalized to reflect current fuel costs.

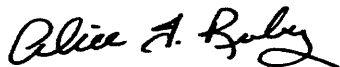
Additionally, it is critical that any discussion regarding infrastructure development in the Lake and Peninsula Borough be couched in a discussion of the economic status of communities in the borough. More specifically, it should be noted that the Lake and Peninsula Borough's unemployment rate ranks with the nation's highest 1% of all counties in the United States. Completion of the Iliamna-Nondalton Road Project will play a vital role in decreasing the cost of living for already distressed communities.

We would also like to reiterate some of the comments and concerns expressed by community members during the five public meetings held by the Alaska Department of Transportation June 22nd-24th, 2004. In those meetings, community members from Aleknagik, Dillingham, Iliamna and Nondalton talked about the compromised health and safety of their friends and families, as well as inflated costs for fuel and building materials. All community entities have long supported and pushed for construction of these projects. It is our position that public comments should somehow be incorporated into the text of the final version of both the Technical Memorandum and Southwest Transportation Plan. These comments speak specifically to the increased quality of life that will result from the completion of both projects.

We urge the Alaska Department of Transportation, the Alaska Court System, and the Alaska State Legislature and all stakeholders to work together to ensure the soonest possible completion of these two vitally important projects.

Regards,

SOUTHWEST ALASKA MUNICIPAL CONFERENCE



Alice Ruby
Board President

cc: Southwest Transportation Advisory Committee
SWAMC Infrastructure Committee
SWAMC Board Members
Sue Urig, Alaska Assistant Attorney General
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